

## The arts

Can you hear the sound of music and laughter? There—in the centre of the village, the women sway and shift their feet in unison while a ring of villagers clap rhythmically and cheer them on. Someone bursts into song and others take up the chorus. The scene fades.

Over there—a different scene. People chat as they approach a house of worship, decorated to lift the mind beyond the material world. Is the decoration carved figures or is it abstract tile patterns? It's hard to make out as the scene fades.

A third scene. On a platform, a man raises his voice in anger to a younger man, who hurls back his defiance, whirls about, and strides away...to step behind a hanging curtain. People gathered watch raptly, caught up in the story the two actors are playing.

How can all three of these scenes represent the arts? How can forms as various as music, dance, sculpture, tile work, and theatre all cluster together into a single category? How can they be joined by opera, photography, novels, poetry, painting, film, and architecture? Is there room for flower arranging, calligraphy, pottery, weaving, and silverworking?

The sheer variability of the arts challenges their classification together. Indeed, not all languages, even those with a flourishing tradition of music, dance, and the visual arts, have the generic word “arts” to contain them all. Even in those languages where the word has long indicated a conceptual category, the territory has borders much less guarded than those of mathematics or the sciences as new forms question the membership criteria and demand to be let in. Yet, despite the looseness of the category of the “arts” and the immense variability within it, they are held together by family resemblances.

As we enter this family of the arts, critical thinking demands that we neither be swept along unthinkingly into its pleasures, nor summarily reject it as knowledge according to the criteria of another area. It demands that we be aware of what the arts try to do, how they do it, and how they affect what we know.

More than any other field, though, the arts may foster a resistance to critical analysis—perhaps because the creator and the critic in this area are not necessarily using criteria of judgment universally accepted within their knowledge community, or perhaps because the experience of creating and enjoying the arts can be so personal and emotional. Even those who expect close scrutiny to be given to works of science have been heard to protest, “I just know whether I like it, and that's enough. Why do we have to tear it apart?” As we move to thinking about the arts, we will try to use critical thinking just as we would in any other area of knowledge, not destructively but respectfully. Being appropriately critical is a way of being appreciative of the knowledge of any area.

**Nathan Bowman, Kentucky, USA**

The banjo is the most obnoxious instrument in the world. It's loud and twangy and addictive. You just can't quit playing.

I grew up playing traditional blue grass with my whole family, including all my cousins, with all of us playing several instruments. The banjo is my eleventh instrument. For me, music is like another language. I can't legitimately claim to be bilingual, or to be fluent in music, but that's how I think of it.

I don't play because I want to express things. I don't play my angst out into my songs! But I can get lost sometimes and realize that four or five hours have passed on the clock and I have holes in my fingers. I have to consciously limit myself to an hour and a half a day.



**What is the purpose of the arts in the IB?**

We enter the arts through your own personal experience. In the IB, you are asked to develop your creativity within CAS and also given the opportunity in group 6 subjects to develop your practice of an art. Outside the IB, you might play in a band, dance, write creatively, or engage in any of the other arts.

Would you be willing to share with others in your class a sample of what you do, and talk about it with them? Ideally, several volunteers from your class will bring their paintings or poetry, for example, or an instrument to play. If you do not feel comfortable sharing samples, feel free in any case to join in discussion about what actually doing an art means to you.

The following questions can be useful in guiding discussion.

- What motivates you to do it?
- What do you get out of it?
- What knowledge do you need to do this art form?
- For you, is your art a way of communicating with others?
- Do you think someone from a different culture or another epoch would understand any communication from your art?
- What do you come to know through doing your art—perhaps information but perhaps also something about yourself or others?

*"Despite my own artistic inclinations to be happy, but I must find, I finally say, in the deepest of desires. As a teacher and as a student, which I still am, I am looking for what it means to understand everyone. More than anything else, even more than my passion for the music itself, it is the motivation which motivates me to my work."*

Douglas Millar, IB graduate 1987.  
Operatic bass-baritone, music teacher<sup>56</sup>

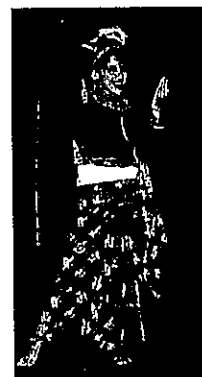
**Mona Aditya, Nepal**

My dance talks about the ironies of life so it's a bit sad, but the rhythm makes me jump and keeps me happy. I have to balance between the rhythm and the meaning.

The gestures and steps have meaning. Some of the steps are obvious, but others are more like a non-verbal language. Since the language is not known to people in Canada where I'm now studying, I try to make my movements very clear. In the dance I put on a bindi to be beautiful as I do make-up in the mirror, but the dance says that life is as fragile as the image on the mirror.

I can't say that the dance represents Nepal because we are so diverse, with 70 dialects and 36 ethnicities.

But it reflects a part of Nepal. Dances are an important part of our culture. We learn them originally in school and put on performances on occasions such as Parents' Day.





But so, too, might sense appeal and emotion. Being moved by music or responding with imaginative identification to characters in literature can create a sometimes startling awareness of common humanity—of sharing our experience as human beings. In a way which is utterly personal and which lends itself to no kind of totally rational test, through the arts we may feel our own lives in the lives of others—and recognize human experience that just might be “true for all”.

#### Follow-up question

Reference is made above to trying to study or analyse the arts. What would be the relevance of the following in such study: biology, psychology, cultural

anthropology, and history? Give examples. Are there other subject areas that you think also contribute to understanding the arts?

Knowing the arts from the perspective of the audience

If you participate in the arts, you probably find yourself drawing on your own feelings, thoughts, personal taste, training, cultural background, and so forth as you create or perform. If you *evaluate* what you have done, you will be trying to take a different perspective—trying to see your work as someone else (or several different people) would see it and trying to put your own performance in context of expectations of form, technique, or expression. The outside critical perspective, difficult though it may be to achieve, can be illuminating and possibly influential for your continuing work.

As the *audience* of the arts, you may be interested solely in having your own personal response, without ever trying to take an outside perspective on it—as is frequently the case if you like or dislike a song, for example, and feel no pressure to analyse your own responses or justify them to anyone. Why should you? It can be one of the great pleasures of the arts that you are able simply to enjoy them or to be affected, whether positively or negatively, and not have to explain.

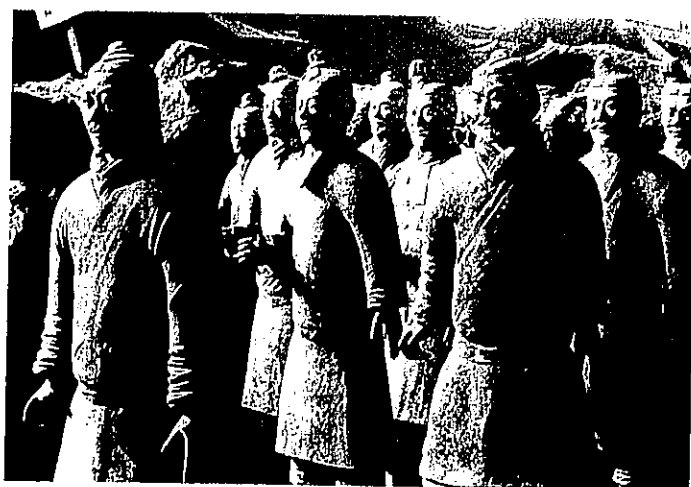
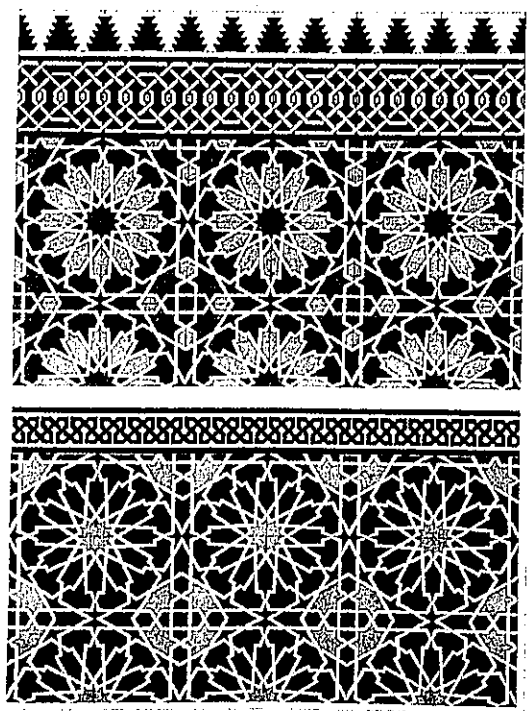
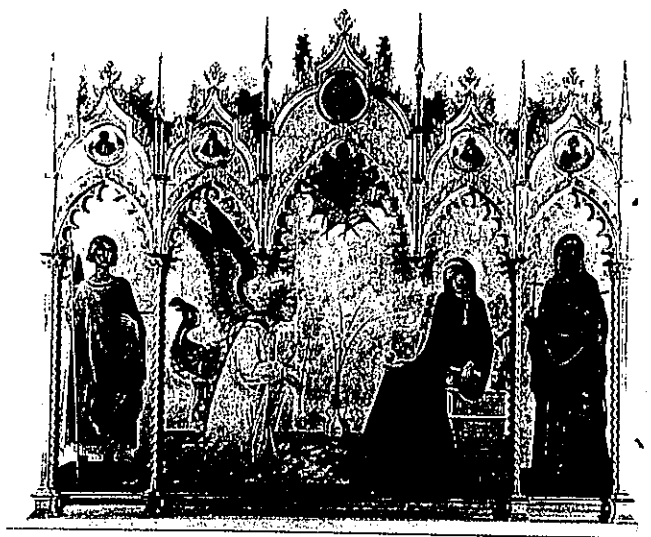
If, however, you wish to gain a greater understanding of your experience, you will try to see yourself and the artwork from an outside perspective, one that may reveal features of the artwork itself, of yourself, and of the context in which your experience is set. Becoming critically aware in the arts, just as in other areas of knowledge, involves some consideration of how the area works.

In the next activity, you will be asked to look at artworks selected in large part for their variety. As you examine and learn about them, you will also be asked to stay aware of your own reactions and whether they change as you learn more. When the four steps in the activity are complete, you and your class will be better prepared for class discussions that follow. May the process be a pleasure!

Activity on arts from around the world

Divide into teams, one for each of the six artworks pictured here.

Try to choose the one least familiar to you. Your goal initially will be to find out about it, share the information you have gained with the



rest of your class, and stay aware of how growing knowledge may affect your response.

*Step 1:* Before you begin to talk with your team, write down your own immediate reaction to the work you will examine. What is your understanding of what it represents? What do you like or dislike about it?

*Step 2:* Get together with your team and discuss your reactions. Do other people's thoughts change the way you respond to the artwork yourself?

*Step 3:* As a team, find out as much about the artwork as you possibly can in the time you have. Prepare yourselves to give a short report to the rest of the class, making sure that you deal as fully as possible with the following questions. You may find that not all the questions readily apply to your particular work.

You will be able to find information on the Internet. However, for one or two images you may not find the exact one given here and should direct your investigation toward the generic form and what it represents.

Simone Martini, *The Annunciation*. Christian, Italy

*Vishnu and Lakshmi, with conch and lotus*. Hindu, India

Bill Reid, *The Jade Canoe "The Spirit of Haida Gwaii"*. Haida, Canada

Picasso, *Guernica*. Spain

Tiles, arabesque pattern, Mosque of Cheykhoun. Islamic art, Egypt

Terracotta Warriors of the Emperor Qin. China

- a Who was/were the artist(s)? Can you find any information on what motivated them, and within what circumstances they were working? If there is no apparent artist whose name you can find out, why not?
- b Who was or is the audience? What role might the artwork perform in their lives? Can you find out anything about audience reaction to it at the time it was done? Can you find out what reactions are to it today?
- c What is the meaning of your artwork within its cultural background? In trying to answer this broad question, consider the relationship between the image and relevant cultural stories, cultural practices, or historical events. Try to find out about any symbolism.
- d Look at the work itself. How are the shapes balanced structurally, for example, or space handled? Do you find it pleasing? Is there any special significance associated with its form?
- e Do you consider this work to be a work of art? Why or why not?

*Step 4:* Return to your full class group. As each team gives a report on its particular artwork, compare your answers to the questions above and your responses to the works.

### Activity follow-up discussion 1

#### *What is the role of the arts in our lives?*

Appoint a scribe to take notes on the various ideas that teams raise and to ensure that everyone gets a copy. You will need these notes later. As you try to identify what the arts do in our lives, keep in mind all the artworks you have just examined and make sure that their apparent roles are reflected in your notes. Feel free, however, to think beyond these six examples.

In examining works of art, learning about them, and commenting on what they do, you have taken a major step toward developing critical perspectives. You have already, as well, recognized the variability in their goals and the cultural contexts that make their works meaningful. Our knowledge creation diagram frames once again a set of dynamics between its component parts and invites comparisons between the arts and other areas of knowledge.

#### *Overview questions for comparison*

To what extent do all the knowledge creators and members of the knowledge community share the same criteria for evaluating the work of art? What other areas of knowledge do the arts most resemble—and most contrast with—in this regard?

To what extent is the social context—the political and economic organization, the history, the cultural practices, for example—something to be overcome and effaced in the creation of knowledge in the arts? What other areas of knowledge do the arts most resemble—and most contrast with—in this regard?

In what ways do creators in the arts build on each other's work? In the relationship of new works to previous works, to what extent do the arts resemble other areas of knowledge? What other areas do they most resemble—and most contrast with—in this regard?

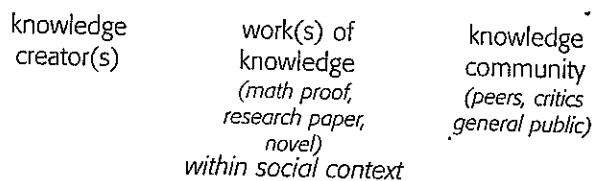
#### *When knowledge precedes judgment?*

In the knowledge creation diagram, the knowledge community of the arts includes peers, critics, and the general public. In the arts, as in other areas, creators may often become critics, and peers may often evaluate each other's work. More than in other areas, however, the role of the creator and the role of the critic may be taken by different people. And more than in other areas, too, are you, as a member of the general public, involved in the role of critic. This involvement highlights an issue of knowledge relevant to all areas. To what extent is it important to have knowledge of the works of an area before you can expect to judge them? What and whose judgments should be taken seriously?

In other areas, the need for specialized knowledge before evaluating works is evident: the works may be incomprehensible to those who are not creators or peers within that particular field. The general

### Knowledge Creation Diagram

*within context of the natural world*



public is involved in evaluation of the natural sciences, for example, not in judging whether a specialized research paper contributes effectively to its field but in judging, within the social context, the broad direction of the natural sciences and the ways in which the knowledge should be used. Moreover, although opinions on the direction of the natural sciences may abound, those which are informed by an understanding of the area are taken, it seems, more seriously. As members of the general public, we listen to those speakers, panellists, columnists, writers, and so forth who seem to us to understand the implications of the research. Or so a critical thinker might hope.

Is specialized knowledge similarly essential in judgments placed on works of art? Is it important to critical thinkers to have informed voices of critics interpreting for us the significance of works and their implications for, say, the direction of the area of knowledge and its impact on us?

As you have probably seen in examining the six quite various works, background knowledge does increase understanding and (depending on how that knowledge affected you) probably also interest and pleasure. As we can recall from discussions of the human sciences, there is a difference between an outside perspective and an inside one; the meaning of an action or an artwork for its own creator or context is different from its meaning for someone unfamiliar with either.

### **Activity follow-up discussion 2**

#### ***What knowledge should precede judgment?***

Consider the following two arguments:

*Surely*, a response that is based on some understanding of the meaning of a work within its context—the context of the culture and the context of expectations of that particular form of art—is a fuller response, and an informed judgment more worthy of being taken seriously.

*Surely*, on the other hand, one of the characteristics of the arts is that they are able to make us respond and understand even if the particular art form is unfamiliar or if we know very little indeed about its context.

Read the two countering arguments raised above and consider your own expectations of knowledge and judgment. With the six works you investigated in mind, respond to the following questions and exchange your views with your classmates.

To what extent is it important to have knowledge of works of art—their cultural context and the expectations of the particular art form—before you can expect to judge them? What and whose judgments should be taken seriously? Does your answer change depending on whether you are thinking of painting, music, or literature?

If works of art can be understood without critical explanation, why is that? Does understanding without explanation characterize some kinds of knowledge?

As you formulate your own thoughts on these questions, try to apply them beyond the arts to the other areas of knowledge that we have also discussed.



### Using critical perspectives

With questions of how we respond to the arts and evaluate them still lingering in your mind, consider your own thoughts, which you discussed earlier, on the roles of the arts.

#### Activity follow-up discussion 3

First, find the notes taken by your scribe in follow-up discussion 1 on the purposes of the arts and their roles in our lives. Try to associate each of the ideas suggested with some part of the knowledge creation diagram.

If you said that art gives a representation of important cultural stories, for example, that statement is relevant to a work's social context. If you said that art expresses the emotions or the beliefs of the artist, to what part of the diagram is that statement most relevant? Did you suggest that the arts please our senses or intrigue our minds, or entertain us, or provide social and historical records, or bind us together in social identities, or teach us our culture, or give us a picture we should face of the problems of our societies, or give us works of beauty, or...? As in other areas of knowledge we have treated previously, you may find that the diagram is useful for clarifying ideas, but at the same time freezes, as if separate, components constantly in dynamic interaction.

In associating your own reflections on the role of the arts within this framework you are placing your ideas within major perspectives on the arts. These perspectives do not exclude each other and, although each provides criteria for evaluation that are unlike those of the other perspectives, one cannot demonstrate another to be false. Although artists and critics themselves often argue for one perspective over another, as we look at the world's art over centuries, we realize that each is rather like a spotlight illuminating a somewhat different part of the whole.

As you read about each of the following critical perspectives, consider the extent to which it resembles your own. Feel free to disagree—and argue for your own point of view.

1 Do you evaluate the artwork with emphasis on the artist?  
(Critical attention focuses on the biography of the artist, the artist's intentions and the creative process, and the expressive quality of the work.)

Some critics emphasize the artist's role—the mysterious creativity that energizes the arts, the inspiration and intentions of the artist at work, and the frustrations, pleasures, and growth of the process. This perspective highlights the expressive role of arts for the creator.

From this perspective, some critics further argue that the essential criterion for a work to be considered "art" is that the creator must have intended it to be so. The implications of this particular argument are that we cannot be sure that a work is "art" unless we are sure of the artist's intentions. A further implication is that creative products made with a practical or social purpose, or those of cultures with no general concept of art, are eliminated because their creators did not have the intention of creating art.

From this perspective, which of the six works of art from your earlier activity would be disqualified as art? Which would be most strongly affirmed to be art?

*Do you think that the work of art itself is the essential quality?*

*(Critical attention focuses on the formal features of the work, its composition and technique.)*

Some critics stress above all the work of art itself—the text of the poem on the page, the arrangement and quality of sounds in music, the movements in space of a dance. Many critics argue that aesthetic form is the essential criterion for a work to be art. It must be beautiful.



Whether it treats ugly or troubling subject matter, as do many works of literature, film, and painting, is irrelevant to its aesthetic appeal. A work is aesthetically beautiful if it is beautifully composed and has mastery of technique. *Guernica*, for example, with its grotesque and distorted figures, possesses a composition that holds the tormented individual images in balance. Notice the strong sense of form and pattern that underlies the work, and the balance of light and dark.

The aesthetic approach to the arts is often held to be contrary to any that involve the emotions, as a formal response is described as contemplative, even rational. It is a recognition of pure pattern. If you did the exercise on mathematics and music (see page 138), you will recall the use of mathematics as an ideal language of pattern with which to do compositional analysis. Interestingly, in works that people find aesthetically pleasing, certain mathematical ratios recur, for example the proportions called the golden ratio or the golden section.

You are not unfamiliar with this criterion at work. In your IB literature course, the commentary portion stresses (along with features that fit other perspectives here) the formal aspects of text—the “shape” of the work, and the way technical devices, handled skilfully, create their meaning and their effect.

From this perspective, is any of the six works from your activity disqualified as art? Is any, in your view, strongly affirmed as art?

*(Critical attention focuses on the effect the work of art has on the audience.)*

Many critics argue that the intention of an artist is irrelevant to evaluating an artwork, and that what is of primary or even exclusive importance is the impact the work has upon its audience—the peers affected in their own work, the public moved to rapture or extreme annoyance. Some critics argue that art exists only within this response.

This perspective highlights, for example, the way a piece of music may make people sing along with pleasure, or the way its experimental features may challenge an audience to join the adventure into new territory. It brings attention to the impact of social criticism or satire, the popularity of certain forms, and the continued popularity of many works which pass the “test of time” and continue to “speak” to people long after their creator has gone. It is also the perspective that most emphasizes ethical issues over what should or should not be treated in art, and how.

From this perspective, is any of the six works from your activity disqualified as art? Is any, in your view, strongly affirmed as art?

4/5 Do you evaluate the artwork with emphasis on the context of the natural world or society?

*(Critical attention focuses on the effectiveness of the work in representing its context, and its role as a social and historical document or artefact.)*

Many critics give attention above all to the way the arts can give a vivid portrayal of the world. Literature, for example, may reflect keenly observed details of psychological and social interactions or depict our societies with all their flaws and glories. Painting may catch light as it plays across water or a woman’s face, or pick out revealing moments of our societies in action. It is from this perspective, in combination with that of the reaction of the reader or audience, that we most recognize the capacity of the arts to take us imaginatively into the lives of other individuals and other societies.

Moreover, the artwork can, in capturing a record of people, places, and times, provide a kind of evidence of their tastes, values, and experiences.

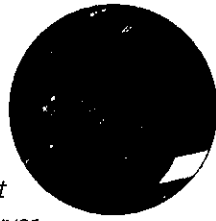
You are not unfamiliar with this criterion at work. In your language A1 course, the works you read take you into the lives of people and societies, some of them crossing cultures in the process.

From this perspective, is any of the six works from your class activity disqualified as art? Is any, in your view, strongly affirmed as art?

## What does "theory" mean in literature?

### Becky Halvorson, IB graduate 1986

Becky Halvorson has a BA and MA in English Literature. She has taught English at university level at Capilano College in Vancouver, Canada and has taught IB English and Theory of Knowledge in IB schools in India, USA, and Canada.



Theories in science often compete in their attempts to explain the natural world, with old theories replaced by new ones that seem to explain better. How does theory function in a field like literature?

I'll answer with respect to the field of English literature and language studies, though many of its theoretical perspectives have been imported from other languages. The study of English literature in the 21st century supports many theoretical perspectives at the same time. These different approaches can interact with one another in collaboration or opposition in order to illuminate the effects of one approach on the other. Frequently an intact theoretical approach is applied to a literary text, such as a feminist reading of *Hamlet*. Sometimes in literary studies, though, the development of the theory itself is the main focus, with literature providing examples to illustrate abstract theoretical points about how language works, such as in deconstruction. Theories thus evolve and increase our insight into various relationships between language and literature.

#### Do any theories in literature remain unchanged over time?

The classic of literary studies is ironically called New Criticism, dating from the 1920s, which is so timeless and pervasive that it can be mistaken as the only theoretical approach to literature. It avoids any political, social, cultural, and historical context, and instead consists of close reading of literary devices ostensibly to reveal the work's objective meaning and our common humanity. The close reading

techniques of New Criticism remain popular and valuable in literary studies.

#### What are some of the other theoretical approaches?

Other fields of literary criticism are also concerned with literature's context, and therefore ask fundamental questions similar to those of other subject areas. For example, when we read a poem, novel, short story, or play, we read not only the words on the page, but also infer the assumptions and values in it. Deconstruction exposes the implications of oppositions, and of what is included and excluded from a text, by examining how language itself constructs values. Biographical and psychoanalytic critical approaches are especially interested in the assumptions and values of the text's author, and we consider the same questions of ourselves as readers when we employ reader response criticism. We pay attention to the wider context of the writer and his or her work in New Historicism and cultural studies, with focus on social class in a Marxist approach, gender in feminism, and sexual orientation in queer theory. Postcolonial theory combines many of these perspectives, with a particular interest in race and culture in relation to colonization. These approaches encourage us to understand the climate that preserved that piece of literature for us to read today. As a result, we may realize the importance of literary studies not only as a source of aesthetic approaches to knowing, but also as a study of how literature reveals—and in fact contributes to—knowledge as a form of power in a society.

#### Question for discussion

In this interview, Becky Halvorson uses "theory" in the way it is used within the field of critical studies. In this TOK book, though, the word "theory" is replaced with the word "perspective" or "argument" in considering the arts. In what ways do you consider the perspectives of the arts, regardless of what name we give them, to be similar to theories in the sciences? In what ways are they different?

expanding TOK reflection on the arts

In TOK essays on the arts, students commonly make only two comments—that they express the emotions of the artist and that they must be beautiful (with beauty being in the eye of the beholder). They tend to use as their examples only paintings of 20th century Europe. May this generalization quickly be falsified!

### Parades, Parades

There's the wide desert, but no one marches  
except in the pads of old caravans,  
there is the ocean, but the keels incise  
the precise, old parallels,  
there's the blue sea above the mountains  
but they scratch the same lines  
in the jet trails—  
so the politicians plod  
without imagination, circling  
the same sombre garden  
with its fountain dry in the forecourt,  
the gri-gri palms desiccating  
dung pods like goats,  
the same lines rule the White Papers,  
the same steps ascend Whitehall,  
and only the name of the fool changes  
under the plumed white cork-hat  
for the Independence Parades,  
revolving around, in calypso,  
to the brazen joy of the tubas.

Here he comes now, here he comes!  
Papa! Papa! With his crowd,  
the sleek, waddling seals of his Cabinet,  
trundling up to the dais,  
as the wind puts its tail between  
the cleft of the mountain, and a wave  
coughs once, abruptly.  
Who will name this silence  
respect? Those forced, hoarse hosannas  
awe? That tin-ringing tune  
from the pumping, circling horns  
the New World? Find a name  
for that look on the faces  
of the electorate. Tell me  
how it all happened, and why  
I said nothing.

*Derek Walcott*

Why are the eyes of the beautiful  
and unmarked children  
in the uniforms of the country  
bewildered and shy,  
why do they widen in terror  
of the pride drummed into their minds?  
Were they truer, the old songs,  
when the law lived far away,  
when the veiled queen, her girth  
as comfortable as cushions,  
upheld the orb with its stern admonitions?  
We wait for the changing of statues,  
for the change of parades.

Show now a broader understanding of perspectives on the arts as you consider this poem written by Derek Walcott, from St. Lucia in the Caribbean, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992.

- 1 How does Walcott express his emotions? Now go further. Does the poem seem written to express the author's personal feelings *for his own sake*, while we as readers eavesdrop, or does it seem

that the personal voice is used as a *strategy* to reach and provoke others?

- 2 Is the poem beautiful? No. Let us, going further, rephrase the question to stress *aesthetic beauty* of form. Is the poem effectively shaped in its overall structure and technically adept in its use of language and poetic devices?

Now add the following questions.

- 3 In what ways does the poem comment on the society in which it is written, and stand as a social document itself? What is Walcott saying about the transfer of power in a former colony which has gained its independence? If you were interested above all in post-colonial issues, what might you say about it?
- 4 Do you *believe* the poet, and accept him as an authority on problems in the Caribbean? Are you inclined, when an author presents a point of view personally and vividly, to accept the point of view presented? If so, you might wish to reflect on the persuasive power of literature.
- 5 Look back now in addition to the other two poems to which you have been introduced in this book, "Sunlight on the Garden" by Louis MacNeice (see page 40) and "Grief" by Denise Levertov (see page 61). Although all three deal with very particular experiences and are quite obviously subjective, do they give or imply any general understanding relevant to broader experience?

### Choreographer, dancer, and critic *Feaigh O'Conchuir* in the arts

#### **Feaigh O'Conchuir, IB graduate 1988**

*Having completed degrees in English and in European Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, Feaigh O'Conchuir trained as a dancer and choreographer at London Contemporary Dance School. He has since performed internationally with companies including Adventures in Motion Pictures and Arc Dance Company. In 2001, he set up his own company, Corp Feasa and has made work for it that has been shown in Ireland and abroad. In 2005, he became Ireland Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme.*



**As a choreographer, what are your main goals as you compose or design a dance? Is a dance in any way a statement or expression of knowledge?**

Dance is a body of knowledge, an exploration of the knowledge within and between our bodies. When we learn a new language, when we learn to play an instrument, when we learn to love, our bodies grow and change: neural pathways are extended, specific co-ordinations of muscle-strength and flexibility are

established and the physical sensations of a particular emotion are stored. The processes are not secondary to knowledge acquisition; they are the process of learning. However, many people are oblivious to this physical aspect of knowledge. In a western culture in which a strand of religious thinking regards the body as animal and reprehensibly distanced from the divine, and in which a Cartesian separation of mind and body privileges mind as the site of selfhood and consciousness, the ignorance of body knowledge is as unsurprising as it is unhelpful.

In choreographing I am trying to understand, express and extend the knowledge in my body and in the bodies of the dancers with whom I collaborate. When I share my work with an audience, I want to model for them the possibility of growth and understanding which they may not have experienced. Such growth is a moral imperative for me. If Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth living, I suggest that the examination should start in our mindful bodies, in our embodied minds. Dance, among a range of mind and body practices such as yoga or tai chi, provides me with a framework for that study.

**As both a dancer and a choreographer, you practise, in a sense, two different art forms. What, for you, is the relationship between the two?**

There are similarities in the relationship between the composer and the musician and that between the choreographer and dancer. The composer decides what notes go where but when s/he writes a symphony s/he is not in a position to deliver all the notes. The distinction is usually drawn between the composer/choreographer as a creative artist and the musician/dancer as an interpretive artist. In much current choreographic practice, however, the dancer is expected to have a great deal of creative input, contributing movement ideas that a choreographer uses and shapes. Unlike the composer who may compose complex scores in the privacy of his or her room before ever encountering the musicians who will deliver the work, choreography takes place most often in a studio, evolving over time in relationship with the dancers who will perform the work. In these situations the dancers are more than interpreters of the work, they can be creative partners too. This creative contribution can be overlooked, however, because of the circumstantial power-differential which often exists between those titled "choreographer" and those called "dancers".

When I choreograph, I take responsibility for the work and by doing so hope to facilitate the free and creative exploration of the dancers. In my case, the environment I create and the atmosphere I foster is my greatest contribution to the choreographic process. The rest is open to chance, to discovery, to the inspiration of others. Instead of fleshing out something I already know, this is the way I learn something new.

I have danced for other choreographers and choreographed often for other performers, but at the moment I derive greatest satisfaction from performing my own work. This is not the case for many choreographers, some of whom would argue that it is impossible to consider how a work is taking shape, how it looks when one is inside it. But for me there are a number of reasons for wanting to be inside the performance, even if I use video technology in the choreographic process to allow me to see and shape the work from the outside: if I expect an audience to learn something from my work, in particular if I want them to better comprehend a way of being, I think it is my responsibility to face that challenge myself, to lead

by example. I also want to be a direct part of the encounter with an audience, not simply authoring the work and abandoning it but learning from experience how an audience reacts to what I have made. The challenge to grow is two-way. It's a demand I make of myself as much as it is an invitation to the audience.

**What do you see as the relationship between the dance creator and the dance critic? Do they have to possess different kinds of knowledge?**

I think I've always wanted to be an artist or whatever I understood an artist to be, but it took me a while to find that dance could provide me with a form for artistic investigation and expression. I studied literature at university, was good at words and thought writing might be my art form. However, whenever I tried to write, I felt hampered by my critical knowledge. I was aware of my shortcomings, aware of how derivative my "voice" was. Later, when I began choreographing, I had no such direct critical knowledge and felt free to acknowledge the validity of the movement that came from me. Of course, the movement was derivative, unconsciously influenced by a lifetime of exposure to a variety of physicalities (Ukrainian dance, MGM musicals, sports, kayaking). Of course, I wasn't entirely without critical knowledge either, since the years of studying literature taught me many ideas about aesthetics, about form and structure, which I could apply indirectly to my new art form. The prerequisite for my creative process, however, is that critical knowledge doesn't precede and consequently dampen the creative spark that I need to ignite my work. Once that spark has been allowed to express itself, once it is outside of me and I can observe it, then all my critical and analytical faculties can kick in. The artist needs to be creator and first critic of his/her work; but without the moment of creativity, the critic's work cannot begin.

**In general, what do you consider the relationship to be between the creator and the critic? What is the role of critical theory in an understanding of the arts?**

The burgeoning of critical theories (psychoanalytical, feminist, new-historicist, post-colonial, queer, deconstructive, Marxist etc.) has provided new ways of reading and seeing and in doing so has altered how we experience the world. These ways of seeing seek to replace existing filters on our perception that have become so familiar as to be invisible. However, these radical theories very quickly become new

orthodoxy. The danger with orthodoxies is that in allowing us to see some stories, they are blind to others. The artist's job is to keep exploring and expressing the widest range and deepest extent of stories possible. Attentive, informed and adventurous theory can help those stories be perceived; theory that has atrophied into dogma can hide them. But the stories exist in the art, waiting to be acknowledged.

### Questions for discussion

- 1 In what ways is the "body knowledge" of which Fearghus O'Conchuir speaks related to the three forms of knowing identified in this book: knowing by experience, knowing how, and knowing that? Is it a blend of these, or is it something else entirely and largely neglected in this book?
- 2 Fearghus likens the choreographer to the composer. Are there other art forms in which this distinction between composer and performer is also relevant? What, do you think, is the difference in the kind of knowledge that each role demands?
- 3 On the basis of this interview, what ways of knowing would you say are involved in dance? What would you add from your own experience?
- 4 Fearghus speaks of wanting the audience to learn through his dance, but also growing himself in his relationship with the audience. What do you think you yourself learn from watching dance performance, theatre, live music, or any other form of performance arts?

### What is *good* art?

The arts, clearly, can be appreciated from many perspectives. How, though, do we evaluate the quality of a work? The arts frequently make their own value judgments on human attitudes and actions. What value judgments do we now place on works of art? What makes a work of art *good*?

Various answers lie in various critical perspectives, in effective fulfillment of the expectations of each position. What, do you think, would make a work of art excellent for each?

- from a perspective that stresses the creator and the creative process?
- from a perspective that stresses aesthetic form?
- from a perspective that stresses the effect on the audience?
- from perspectives that stress the contexts of the natural world and society?

Moreover, of all of these perspectives, which is the most important? Perhaps, in response, we might think about the role of criticism in different areas of knowledge. In some areas, the role of criticism is to scrutinize a work closely to ensure that it meets the criteria of evaluation established and held in common by the creators of knowledge and their entire knowledge community. Criticism used in this way is essential to the creation of their knowledge.

In the arts the role of criticism is also to look closely at a work—but there is not a single set of criteria for judgment, nor need there be. A work of atonal music does not logically contradict a classical symphony, nor does a Cossack dance falsify ballet; two novels giving opposing depictions of the same society do not violate the coherence test for truth. And we do not add up the landscape paintings of the world and average them to find a general view. The arts give innumerable particular views and can simultaneously accept works quite unlike each other.



That does not mean that criticism is free of debate over criteria of judgment: musicians, writers, and others often disagree heatedly, and often clash with their traditions. The contemporary standards of judgment may reject works of art as pseudo-art, but it is the standards themselves that may be forced to yield. In the arts, knowledge is first the creation of the artist, and *only* afterwards—and in a different way—the understanding of the critic.

And neither creation nor criticism is fixed or static.

Examining shifting styles in the arts, crossing time, creates an appreciation of the arts slightly different from the one we gain by crossing cultures. We can look back on a history of obsolete scientific theories, significant in the present as stepping stones on the way to our current knowledge, but of no present worth in themselves according to the criteria of evaluation of the sciences. In contrast, a work of art may remain today just as valuable as ever: it may be just as aesthetically beautiful, as powerfully emotionally affecting, or as illuminating of people and society. It may be, admittedly, that we attribute to it a meaning different from the one it had in its original context—a different meaning, or even additional meaning as we look back within a tradition. But more than in areas of knowledge which aim for progress toward a common goal, we take the works of previous eras along with us into our present. We can look out over the immense wealth of the arts across cultures and across time, and feel a connection with a multitude of others sharing a common human experience.

### Question for reflection

To what extent in areas of knowledge other than the arts do new works force the standards of judgment to change?

## Ethics

Meeting ethics as an area of knowledge can give a strange sense of recognition. Haven't we met before? Isn't there a strong family resemblance with the areas with which we have already been spending time? The human sciences and history talk a lot about motives, decisions, actions, and consequences of actions. They also show us much about human moral values. What is it that makes ethics different from other members of this knowledge family?

First impressions, though, grow more complex at a closer look. Yes, there is a difference, and it does make ethics distinct. It is still studying human action—but studies not how human beings *do act* (human sciences) nor how they *have acted* in the past (history) but rather how they *should act*.

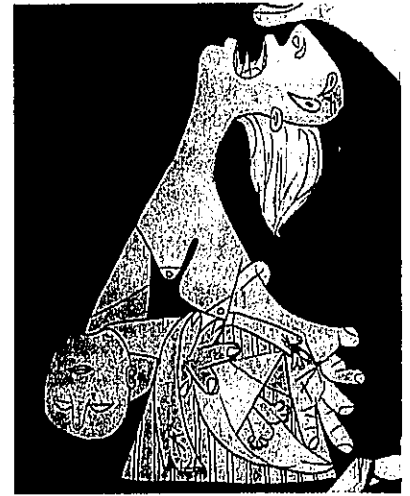
### How *should* human beings treat each other?

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, looked back in 1998 at a century for which *Guernica* stands as an icon:

*The world has changed since I have retired. But I still believe that peace is not the absence of war. It is the absence of the conditions that have created both the need for war and the suffering it brings. It is the absence of the conditions that have created both the need for war and the suffering it brings. It is the absence of the conditions that have created both the need for war and the suffering it brings.*

Read his words closely. What are the values that he is either stating or implying for how people should treat each other?

Look again at Picasso's *Guernica*. The emotional outcry against violence and the pain of war need not be confined just to the bombed civilians of the village of Guernica. Could any values be inferred from his painting regarding how human beings *should* or *should not* treat each other? To what extent is it possible to infer a general statement from a particular image?



Ah. How very much like many works in the arts! Among paintings and plays, novels and dances are huge numbers which apply value judgments of "right" and "wrong" to human actions. They praise, condemn, or counsel; they declare or imply that people *should act* or *should not act* in particular ways.

Yet looking still more closely, we can again see differences within the family resemblance. Many works of art, such as an abstract painting or a lyrical flute solo, make no moral judgment at all. Moreover, the moral judgments that do run through the arts are particular to the works themselves.

Ethics, on the other hand, takes moral judgment as its only topic and seeks to be general—to comment not just on individual stories but to comment on them all—to give general perspectives that can apply to particular cases.

But what is it that ethics comments upon? Where are the works of ethics equivalent to new works of the sciences, or history, or the arts? In areas we have previously met, the critics comment upon the work of their own areas: critics of mathematics examine proofs and the nature of proofs; critics in the sciences scrutinize and test research findings, and critics in the arts evaluate creative works.

But what does the critic in ethics examine? It seems that ethics has no equivalent area that is specifically its own. It treats instead a specific aspect of all of the subject matter and methods of all the other areas of knowledge. It also examines our everyday decisions and actions from the most private and personal to the most public and political. It surveys all that human beings do and persistently asks these kinds of questions: "What does it mean to be good?" "What should I do (or not do)?" "How do we justify our moral decisions?" And then it explores possible ways of thinking about the questions and possible ways to answer. Ethics is essentially an area